WHY DO WE PRAY?



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*Bismi All<u>a</u>hi A**l**rra<u>h</u>m<u>a</u>ni A**l**rra<u>h</u>eemi*

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

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Edited By IslamFuture

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

WHY DOES MAN NEED TO PRAY?

After a long and hectic day at work, how difficult it is for a tired person to stand on the prayer-mat and concentrate on his prayers to Allah Almighty. Snuggled in a warm and cozy bed, how difficult it is to get up at the call of Mu'adhdhin: "Come to prayer, come to success." The famous doctor and philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna), recalls such a moment in his life. Once cold and icy night, he and his slave were resting in an inn in a remote part of Khurasan. During the night he felt thirsty and shouted out to his slave to get him some water. The salve had no desire to leave his warm bed, so he pretended not to hear Avicenna's call. But finally after repeated calls he reluctantly got up and went to fetch the water. A little while later, the melodious sound of the Adhan filled the air. Avicenna began to think about the person calling the believers to prayer. My slave Abdullah, he mused, has always respected and admired me. He seizes any opportunity to lavish praise and affection on me but tonight, he preferred his own comfort to my needs. On the other hand, look at this Persian slave of Allah. He left his warm bed to go out in the chilly night, he made ablution in the icy water of the stream, and then he ascended the high minaret of the mosque to glorify He Whom he truly serves.

"I bear witness that there is none to be worshipped except Allah." "I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

Tonight, Avicenna records, I learned the essence of true love; that love which results in complete obedience. The love of Allah demands total and unconditional obedience.

Allah almighty says:

"Say (O Muhammad (pbuh) to mankind): 'If you (really) love Allah then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic monotheism, follow the Quran and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins.' And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (3:31)

PRAYER: A CRY OF THE INNER SOUL

His arrogance and pride has often led man to behave as an oppressor and a tyrant. Some men have been so carried away by their own self-importance that they have even claimed divinity. Pharoah (Firaun), the ruler of Egypt, was among those who announced:

"I am your supreme lord."

With his sense of greatness and pride, Firaun subjugated the Israelites and made their lives wretched and miserable.

But is man really as strong and great as his ego tells him? The Quran tells us the reality of man's nature.

"Allah is He Who created you in (a state of) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave (you) weakness and gray hair. He creates what He wills. And it is He Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful (i.e. Able to do all things)." (30:54)

Weakness in the beginning and weakness in the end: this is the essence of man. He is so weak and helpless at birth that his entire existence depends on his parents and family. If he were to be abandoned in these crucial first years, he could not survive on his own. He needs

a gentle and loving hand, not only in his infancy but in his childhood and even in the teenage years.

As this child enters the years of youth and independence, he begins to take control of his own life. He looks with pride at his strong physique, his handsome features and his many talents. He begins to despise those of lesser abilities, even scorning those parents who exhausted their own health to nurture him. He becomes unjust and cruel, using his strength and vigor to dominate others. He thinks he is a master, free to act as he wills. but does this youth, these good looks and this strength last forever? Only in a few decades he begins to lose his strength. His health begins to deteriorate, gray hair covers his head and slowly, his youth is replaced by old age. This transformation from young to old is slow, but it is there. The seconds of time are ticking away mercilessly, taking every young person towards their old age. The young dictator will one day be as feeble and weak as the day he was born. But this time there will be no parents to nurture him; if, as is often the case, he is rejected by his own family, his future will be a desolate one in some persons' home.

"Weakness in the beginning, weakness in the end." The message is clear: the real Master is Allah. He alone is Mighty, He Alone is Great.

He alone is never tired, never needs rest, is never dependent upon anyone.

Allahu Akbar - Allah is the Greatest.

With this message clear in his mind, man realizes that he should show his humility to the Almighty Lord, the One Who created him. And what can be a better way to show one's humility than to stand like a slave before Him; to bow and prostrate to Him; to raise hands in supplication to Him.

Prayer is not a burden forced upon man but is the inner cry of every soul. A cry of each heart to recognize its Creator. It is but a small token of gratitude for all the innumerable bounties bestowed upon mankind by the Creator.

In our everyday lives, we smile and say a warm thank-you to the small acts of kindness which others do for us. so what about thanking Allah, Who in His infinite Mercy has provided for every single one of our needs. Just observe the beauty and perfection of the earth around you, and fall down in gratitude to you Lord.

PRAYER: THE ASCENSION FOR A BELIEVER

After Allah's Messenger (pbuh) was commissioned for Prophethood, the first thing he was commanded to do by Allah was to pray. The angel Jibrail (Gabriel) came to him, and a spring of water gushed out from the rocks in front of them. Jibrail then showed the Prophet (pbuh) how to do ablution. He then showed him how to offer prayers to Allah. The Messenger (pbuh) of Allah began to pray two Raka twice a day; once in the morning and once in the evening. He then went home and showed his wife Khadija what he had learned from angel Jibrail. Since that time, the Prophet never went through a day without praying. Just before his migration (Hijrah) to Al-Madinah, Allah's Messenger (pbuh) was taken by night to Jerusalem and then to the heavens (Miraj). during this journey, Allah almighty commanded him to pray five times a day. This prayer was a gift given to every believer to enable him to experience a spiritual ascension five times in every day. The Prophet (pbuh)

explained that " The prayer is the Miraj of the believer." It gives every Muslim the opportunity to communicate with his Lord.

During each prayer, the worshipper recites Surah Al Fatiha. This recitation is not a dull monologue by the believer, but Allah promises that it is a conversation between Him and the worshipper. The Messenger (pbuh) reported that Allah Almighty says:

"When My slave says (in hi sprayer): 'All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds', I say : 'My slave has praised Me.' when he says: ' the Merciful, the Compassionate, Master of the Day of Judgment', I say: 'My slave has praised and glorified Me'. When he says: ' You Alone we worship, and Your Aid we seek, ' I say: 'This is between My slave and Myself.' When he says: 'Show us the Straight Path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not of those who earned Your anger nor of those who went astray.' I say: 'This is for My slave, and I give My slave what he wants." (Hadith Qudsi)

The number of prayers in a day have been set at five by Allah almighty. The believer has no choice in the matter but to obey. To reduce the number of prayers would not only be disobedience, it would also lose the benefits of prayer.

For example, a room is only good fro residence if it has four walls and a roof. If only one wall or the roof were to be removed, what use could it be? Similarly, the prayer will only achieve its purpose and be of use on the Day when nothing except one's deeds will be of use, if it is observed in the prescribed manner.

PRAYER: A PILLAR OF ISLAM

Allah's Messenger (pbuh) once said:

"Prayer is the pillar of religion." (Al-Baihaqi)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said:

"Islam is erected on five pillars: to testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger; to establish prayer; to pay Zakat; to perform Hajj to the Sacred House, and to fast in the month of Ramadan." (Bukhari, Muslim)

This Hadith makes the image very clear. Islam is like a building, supported by five columns. Remove just one column, and the entire building weakens.

If strong winds batter the town, the building which will certainly collapse is the one with a pillar missing. In the same way, when a person stops praying, his Faith becomes weak and the mildest of blows can cause it to crumble.

The prayer is of such vital importance that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Verily, between man and between polytheism and unbelief is the negligence of prayer." (Muslim)

How true is this statement! If you look at people walking down the road, it may be difficult to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims. Islam is not marked upon a believer's forehead, and neither is Kufr stamped on an infidel's face. But at the time of prayer, you can separate

the two groups with ease. The believer will abandon his work, his business to join the rows of Muslims in prayer, while the disbeliever will carry on with his worldly affairs.

Surah Al-Muddathir narrates an interesting dialogue which will take place on the Day of Judgement. The believers will ask the people of Hell-fire:

"What has caused you to enter Hell?" They will say: "We were not of those who used to offer their prayers. Nor we used to feed the poor; and we used to talk falsehoods (all that which Allah hated) with vain talkers, and we used to belie the Day of Recompense. Until there came to us (the death) that is certain." (72:42-47)

The rejecters of truth are silent in this world, but in the next world they will themselves speak the truth.

PRAYER IS LIKE A FORTRESS

Prayer is the basis of all good actions. Below are quoted two passages of the Quran, both of which list a number of good actions. Prayer comes before and after all good actions:-

A. Surah al-Muminun (23:1-11)

"Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their Salat (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness. And those who turn away from Al-Laghw (dirty, false, evil vain talk, falsehoods and all that Allah has forbidden). And those who pay the Zakat. And those who guard their chastity (i.e. private parts, from illegal sexual acts). Except from their wives or (the captives and slaves) that their right hands possess, -for then, they are free from blame. But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors. Those who are faithfully true to their trusts and to their covenants. And those who strictly guard their Salat (five compulsory congregational prayers at their fixed stated hours). These are indeed the inheritors. Who shall inherit the Firdaus (Paradise). They shall dwell therein forever."

B. Surah Al-Maarif: (70:19-35)

"Verily, man (disbeliever) was created very impatient; irritable (discontented) when evil touches him; and niggardly when good touches him. Except those devoted to Salat (prayers), those who remain constant in their Salat (prayers), and those in whose wealth there is a known right, for the beggar who asks, and for the unlucky who has lost his property and wealth, (and his means of living has been straitened). And those who believe in the Day of Recompense, and those who fear the torment of their Lord. Verily! The torment of their Lord is that before which none can feel secure. And those who guard their chastity (ie, private parts from illegal sexual acts), except with their wives and the (women slaves and captives) whom their right hands possess, -for (then) they are not to be blames. But whosoever seeks beyond that, then it is those who are trespassers. And those who keep their trusts and covenants, and those who stand firm in their testimonies, and those who guard their Salat (prayers) well; such shall dwell in the Gardens (i.e. Paradise) honored."

In these passages, the believers are said to have certain characteristics, the first of which they concentrate on their prayers. Other signs of believers are:

-They avoid vain and vulgar activities.
-They pay their Zakat regularly.
-They guard their chastity and avoid illicit relations. Their marital lives are confines to their wives and salve-girls (assuming such a situation exists in which the presence of slaves is justified).
-Those who do not betray covenants and trusts.
-Those who stand by their testimonies (as in Surah Al-Maarij.).

After mentioning these five characteristics, regularity in prayers is once again commended.

The quotation from Surah Al-Maarij is similar to the one from Surah al-Muaminun. It shows that prayer is like a fortress which protects and preserves other good deeds. To guard one's prayer helps guard one's other virtues. The Prophet (pbuh) said in a similar way:

"Prayer is the pillar of the religion" (Al-Baihaqi)

Allah's Messenger (pbuh) also said:

"The first thing about which a man is going to be questioned on the Day of Judgment is prayer. If it is found to be sound all his other reactions will be sound as well. If his prayer is not sound all his remaining actions would be spoiled." (Al-Tabarani)

WHICH PRAYER IS ACCEPTABLE?

"Those who offer their Salat (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness." (23:2)

The emphasis , in this verse, is on humility and concentration in the prayer (Khushu). There is no doubt that as Shaitan (Satan) is the most bitter enemy of man, he always tries to disturb the believer's prayer. As soon as a person begins his prayer, he finds his mind suddenly engulfed with memories, problems, worries, work and his family. He may become so engrossed in his thoughts that he has no idea where he is and what he is doing. His prayer becomes a series of automatic actions, and he will often find himself wondering whether he has prayed three Rakaa or four. This is how Shaitan steals the prayer.

The Prophet (pbuh) once said that only a tiny portion of the prayer, maybe as little as a tenth or an eighth, is accepted by Allah. The rest is lost because of the whisperings of Shaitan.

It is reported that a Successor saw a man playing with his beard while praying. He commented that: "If there had been Khushu (concentration) in his heart, the other organs of his body would have concentrated as well."

Surah Al-Maun also makes a reference to lifeless prayers:

"So woe unto those performers of prayers (hypocrites), who delay their Salat (prayer) from its stated fixed time, " (107:4,5)

A worshipper is neglectful of his prayers either when he delays the prayer to the last possible minute, or when he does not concentrate fully on what he is doing and saying.

Allah's Messenger (pbuh) was once sitting in the mosque at Al-Madinah when a bedouin entered and began to pray. He prayed so quickly, that when he had finished, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to repeat the prayer. His second attempt was just as hurried, so the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to repeat it again. After a third hurried prayer, the bedouin said: "O Messenger of Allah. I cannot pray better than this." The Prophet (pbuh) then showed the man how to pray. He instructed him to recite Surah Al-Fatiha while in the standing position, then to say Tasbih in the Ruku position, to stand upright saying Rabbana lakal hamd, to go down with Sajdah and recite Tasbih, and to sit between the two Sajdah and recite a Du'a. The Prophet (pbuh) advised the bedouin to do this in each Rakaa. (Musnad Ahmad)

Allah's Messenger (pbuh) used to spend a lot of time on each prayer, so that each movement of the prayer could be offered slowly and properly. He once said: "A man's lengthy prayer and short sermon shows that he has a good understanding of the religion." (Muslim, Abu Dawood)

This refers to the Friday Khutbah which should not be too long while the prayer should be lengthy.

PRAYER AS A WEAPON

Allah Almighty says in the Quran:

"O you who believer! Seek help in patience and Salat (prayer). Truly! Allah is with the patient." (2:153)

Man is, by nature, weak. He needs help at times of misery and hardship. And the best aid we can have is that of patience in adversity and prayer. Any difficulties, unhappiness and loss should be faced with calm and wisdom. A hasty response or an unwise remark will only cause more problems. Allah's Messenger (pbuh) used to look for solace in prayer whenever he experienced difficulties. In prayer one seeks help from Allah, and who can be a better helper than Allah?

The Prophet (pbuh) used to say to Bilal:

"O Bilal! Provide us with rest with prayer."

PRAYER AS A REMINDER

A non-Muslim once asked the following question during a discussion: "I can understand why Muslims were required to pray five times a day during the early days of Islam. They did not have many things to do in those days so the Prophet kept them busy with prayer. But our sophisticated and modern life leaves man with little spare time. He is much too busy to be expected to pray five times a day."

The answer given was what is the primary objective of prayer. The Quran says:

"...and establish prayer for My Remembrance." (20:14)

As man is by nature forgetful, prayer reminds him of the allegiance due to his Creator and Lord. If prayer was needed fourteen hundred years ago when man did not lead such a busy

life style, the it is even more necessary in today's hectic world. On the one hand, education and work keep people occupied constantly. And when it is time to relax. Shaitan (Satan) has found many new channels to operate through, such as television, the cinema and videos. Man becomes so engrossed in this life that he has no thought for Allah and the Hereafter. The need to remind man of the realities of his existence has thus intensified, and not declined in modern times. Prayer is still of utmost importance and benefit in our high-tech lives.

Prayer acts as a shield against evil. Allah Almighty says in the Quran:

"...Verily, As-salat (the prayer) prevents from Al-Fahsha (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse etc.) and al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed etc.)..." (29:45)

The following incident will help understand this point:

In the time of Allah's Messenger (pbuh) lived a man who drank alcohol, gambled and committed thefts habitually.. He came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked for some advice which would help improve his character. The Prophet's advice was simple; "don't tell any lies." The man then left, after having been told to report back the next day. he was feeling very pleased, as the instructions given to him seemed very easy to obey. At home the man poured himself his usual glass of wine. As he lifted the glass to his lips, he suddenly remembered that he had to report back to the Prophet (pbuh) the next day. he would be asked about that day's activities, and if he admitted in front of all the Companions that he had been drinking, it would be terribly embarrassing for him.

If, however, he did not admit to having drunk wine, it would be a lie. So he put the wine away. The same thing happened when he was about to start gambling and go on his robbing expedition. And once this man had taken the first positive step towards fighting his evil habits, he was able to reform very quickly.

Prayer can have a very similar effect. If a person remembers five times a day that he will stand on his prayer-mat and address his Lord, it will prevent him from committing the sins that Shaitan has been encouraging him to do.

The quality of the prayer is of utmost importance as well. consider a house with solid foundations, concrete walls and a strong roof. this house will be able to withstand all forms of bad weather, be it winds, hail or storms. After all, the purpose of a house is to provide shelter and protection against these elements. If, on the other hand, the house is loosely constructed with leaves and grass, it will blow away at the slightest hint of bad weather.

This image applies very clearly to prayer. If a prayer is offered regularly, at the correct time, with sincerity of intention and concentration on what is being recited, it will strengthen the person's Faith and provide comfort and strength in times of trouble.

Irregular and insincere prayers will be of little use to a person in times of distress. A healthy body can combat viruses with more ease that can a weak body.

PRAYER: THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS ESTABLISHING THE ISLAMIC SHARIAH AS A WHOLE

The Quran records the following conversation between Prophet Shuaib and his people:

"And to the Madyan (Midian) people (We sent) their brother Shuaib. He said: O my people! Worship Allah, you have no other Ilah (god) but Him, and give not short measure or weight, I see you in prosperity; and verily I fear for you the torment of a Day encompassing. And O my people! Give full measure and weight in justice and reduce no the things that are due to the people, and do not commit mischief in the land, causing corruption. That which is left by Allah for you (after giving the rights of the people) is better for you, if you are believers. And I am not sent over you as a guardian." (11:84-86)

This was an invitation to honor the Rights of Allah (by accepting Tawhid) and honor the rights (in daily trade and business). But Shuaib's people replied with sarcasm:

"They said: O Shuaib! Does your prayer (i.e., the prayers which you offer has spoiled your mind, so you) command that we leave off what our fathers used to worship, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? Verily, you are the forbearer, right-minded!" (11:87)

Shuaib's people realized that the Prophet was not simply asking them to pray regularly but that he wanted them to establish a whole new economic system as well, hence the references to fair trading. The lesson to be learned from this is that in Islam, there is no leaving "What belongs to God, for God; and what belongs to Caesar, for Caesar." Everything belongs to God. How can a Muslim who worships Allah Almighty during his five daily prayers, be expected to obey others in other aspects of his daily life. There can be no duality of authority in Islam. Allah is the Creator , and His Alone is the right to legislate and demand loyalty. Man is the slave of Allah and should obey Him Alone.

Muslims who live in a non-Muslim state may feel that they are unable to implement the Din of Allah in their political and economic lives, but those Muslims who live in Muslim countries have no excuse for allowing the Din of Allah to be confined to a personal level.

Muslims should be clear that the Din of Allah does not consist simply of prayers, fasting, charity and Hajj. It is their duty to implement all Islamic teachings in political, economic and social fields.

"Truly, the religion with of Allah is Islam..." (3:19)

"And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers". (3:85)

Today's false idols, which dominate over the entire world, are Democracy, Capitalism, Socialism and communism. Instead, Islam calls for a Khilafa (caliphate) based on consultation, and a just economic system based on Zakat and a prohibition of usury. If you remove any of these three characteristics, you make it impossible for Islamic law to operate properly.

The Quran describes clearly the first duty of a Muslim ruler:

"Those (Muslim rulers) who, if We give them power in the land, (they) order for Iqamat-as-Salat{ (i.e. to offer prayers perfectly-the five compulsory, congregational prayers (the males in mosques)}, to pay the Zakat and they enjoin Al-Maruf (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do), and forbid Al-Munkar (i.e., disbelief, polytheism and all that Islam has forbidden) {i.e. they make the Quran as the law of their country in all the spheres of life}. And with Allah rests the end of (all) matters (of creatures)." (22:41)

A well-known Arabic saying is: "The people follow the religion of their kings." Ordinary people enjoy imitating their rulers, and if those in authority set a good example by praying and fasting regularly, the people will be encouraged to do so as well. Those in power can also provide material assistance, such as the construction of mosques and prayer facilities in public places. The Prophet (pbuh) advised the people not to rebel against their leaders...as long as the leaders establish prayer and do not commit acts of open disobedience to Allah. This advice will save the Muslim nation from anarchy and useless bloodshed.

PRAYER AS AN EXPIATION OF SINS

Prayer not only stimulates a person to do good deeds, but it also takes away his minor sins.

"Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds (i.e. small sins), " (11:114)

As prayer is the best of all good actions, it can erase many sins. 'Ali narrated that Abu Bakr heard Allah's Messenger (pbuh) saying:

"Whoever commits a sin, but performs ablution in the best way, then offers two Rakat prayer, and he asks for the forgiveness of Allah, Allah almighty forgives his sins." (Ahmad)

This does not mean to say that a person can commit as many sins as he likes, as long as he follows each sin with a prayer. What Allah's Messenger (pbuh) was showing is that repentance opens the door to forgiveness. Prayer is a form of repentance and should be offered with sincerity and a true desire to amend one's character. After repenting, the person's Faith should be revived, and he should fight all Satanic temptations to do evil.

In Surah Al-Furqan repentance is described as a way out for those who commit major sins:

"And those who invoke not any other Ilah (god) along with Allah, nor kill such life as Allah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse - and whoever does this shall receive the punishment. The torment will be doubled to him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace. Except those who repent and believe (in Islamic Monotheism), and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And whosoever repents and does righteous good deeds, then verily, he repents towards Allah with true repentance. " (25:68-71)

PRAYER: THE FIRST QUESTION ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

Man was sent to this world for only one purpose:

"And I (Allah) created not the jinns and men except they should worship Me (Alone)." (51:56)

Man is to live in this world as a worshipper of his Creator, and the best form of worship is prayer. On the Day of Judgment, man will have to answer for each and every deed committed on this earth. He will be asked about the bounties bestowed upon him in this life:

"Then, on that Day, you shall be asked about the delight (you indulged in, in this world)! (102:8)

But the first question to be asked on that Great Day will be about prayer. Man has two Mauqif (standing positions) in front of his Creator, one in this world and one in the next.

The first is his prayer-mat when he stands in regular prayer to his Lord. The second will be on Judgment Day when his actions will be brought forward as evidence. If his first stand (i.e. his prayer) is found to be correct, his second stand will be made easy for him. If his first stand was faulty, he will face immense difficulties in the second stand.

To intentionally neglect even a single prayer is a serious sin for which there can be no compensation. A Muslim is not to miss a prayer even in the terrifying moments of battle, so how can there be justification for missing his prayers in ordinary circumstances. during battle, the Imam leads same ranks of the contingent in one Rakat of the prayer, while the other soldiers continue to fight. The soldiers then change places, and the Imam leads the second group in prayer, while the first resumes fighting. This continues until everyone had prayed. This particular prayer is called Salat-ul-Khauf (Prayer of Fear) because of its unusual circumstances.

Another form of prayer is the shortened prayer, which is allowed during battle and traveling. The prayers which normally consist of four Rakaat i.e. Zuhr, Asr, and Isha) are shortened to two Rakaat, but in no circumstances can a prayer be missed. The only exemption available is for menstruating women, who are not required to pray during this time. At all other times women must pray just like men. So strict is the requirement of prayer that a person who is ill, no matter how seriously, must pray as long as he or she is in consciousness. If the person can not stand, then the prayer is offered in the sitting position; if the person is too ill to sit, then the prayer is offered in the lying position, using the eyes, head, hands, etc., to signal the different movements of the prayer.

SANCTITY OF THE MOSQUES

The places of worship are symbols of security for the people. One of the benefits of Jihad is to preserve their sanctity and keep them open for the purpose of worship.

Allah Almighty says in Surah Al-Hajj:

"Permission to fight is given to those (i.e. believers against disbelievers), who are fighting them, (and) because they (believers) have been wronged, and surely, Allah is Able to give them (believers) victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said: 'Our Lord is Allah'. - For had it not been that Allah checks one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the Name of Allah is mentioned much would surely have been pulled down. Verily, Allah will help those who help His (Cause). Truly, Allah is All-Strong, All-Mighty." (22:39,40)

The Muslims are required to raise the banner of Jihad in order to make the Word of Allah supreme in this world, to remove all forms of injustice and oppression, and to defend the

Muslims. If Muslims do not take up the sword, the evil tyrants of this earth will be able to continue oppressing the weak and helpless, and all places of worship, including the mosques, churches and synagogues will be annihilated. A vivid example of this in the modern world has been the Soviet Union, which crushed religion and emptied all places of worship.

The Characteristics of those who populate the Houses of Allah:

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp, the lap is in glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east (i.e. neither it gets sun rays only in the morning) nor of the west (i.e. nor it gets sun rays only in the afternoon, - but it is exposed to the sun all day long), whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself), thought no fire touches it. Light upon Light! Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allah sets forth parables for mankind, and Allah is All-Knower of everything. In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, to be cleaned, and to be honored, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the afternoons or the evenings. Men whom neither trade nor sale diverts them from the Remembrance of Allah (with heart and tongue), nor from offering the prayers perfectly (Iqamat-as-Salat), nor from giving the Zakat. They fear a Day when hearts and eyes will be overturned (from the horror of the torment of the Day of Resurrection)." (24:35-37)

The infidel lives in complete darkness, but once he believes in Allah, the whole universe becomes full of light for him. this pure light of Faith is the subject of the above verses of Surah An-Nur. The niche, as mentioned in the parable, is understood to mean the heart of the believer. Such a niche is not to be found everywhere but only in the Houses of Allah which are erected for the Remembrance of Allah. Such houses (or mosques) are not populated by ordinary men but by special and esteemed characters, who are described by Allah Almighty thus:

i) They glorify the Name of Allah in the mosques each morning and evening.

ii) Their businesses and worldly gains do not hinder them from praying and giving charity.

iii) The constantly fear the Last Day, the day when each soul will be resurrected to stand before Allah and to account for every single one of his deeds.

PRAYER: A DUTY KNOWN TO EVERY PROPHET OF ALLAH

Prophet Ibrahim recited the following Du'a when he was raising the walls of the Kabah in Makkah:

"O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley with no cultivation, by Your Sacred House (the Kabah at Makkah); in order, O our Lord, that they may offer prayers perfectly (Iqamat-as-Salat)..."(14:37)

While he prayed for himself and his children, Prophet Ibrahim did not ask for riches and fame. he pleaded instead:

"O my Lord! Make me one who offers prayers perfectly (Iqamat-As-Salat), and (also) from my offspring, our Lord! And accept my invocation. Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and (all) the believers on the Day when the reckoning will be established." (14:40,41)

Prophet Ismail has also been praised for his character in the Quran:

"And mention in the Book (the Quran) Ismail. Verily! He was true to what he promised, and he was a Messenger, (and) a Prophet. And he used to enjoin on his family and his people As-Salat (i.e. order them to offer the prayers perfectly) and the Zakat, and his Lord was pleased with him." (19:54,55)

Prophet Zakariya was childless in his old age, and he yearned constantly for a son: "At that time Zakariya (Zachariah) invoked his Lord, saying: 'O my Lord! Grant me from You, a good offspring. You are indeed the All-Hearer of invocation.'"(3:38)

And while he was praying to Allah, he received the good news:

"Then the angels called him, while he was standing in prayer in Al-Mihrab (a praying place or a private room), (saying): 'Allah gives you glad tidings of Yahya (John) confirming (believing in) the Word from Allah {i.e. the creation of Jesus" (Be!"- and he was! {i.e. Jesus, son of Mary)}, noble, keeping away from sexual relations with women, a Prophet, from among the righteous.'" (3:39)

Prophet Isa received Divine communications while he was still a baby in his cradle: "...and has enjoined on me Salat (prayer), and Zakat, as long as I live." (19:31)

So the daily prayer is not a new act introduced by Allah's Messenger (pbuh). It is a form of personal communication with Allah, and it is as old as the first man on this planet.

Prayer cannot be an isolated act:

The Quran mentions the act of prayer about thirty-five times, but never alone. It always couples prayer with giving Zakat or spending on the poor and needy. The two are inseparable. The person who gives charity but does not pray five times a day is only earning the displeasure of Allah.

In the early days of his caliphate, Abu Bakr went to war against those people who had stopped paying Zakat after the death of Allah's Messenger (pbuh). He said:

"By Allah! I will fight those who differentiate between Salat (prayer) and Zakat."

Another virtue which is mentioned with prayer in the Quran is patience:

"O you who believer! Seek help in patience and Salat (prayer). Truly! Allah is with the patient." (2:153)

Man is surrounded by external and internal problems. To deal with these, he has been given the two weapons of prayer and patience. Patience helps him withstand external hostilities and opposition. Prayer strengthens his internal relationship with God.

Another requirement alongside prayer is that of sacrifice, on the day of Eid during the time of Hajj:

"Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice (to Him only). For he who makes you angry (O Muhammad{pbuh}), - he will be cut off (from every good thing in this world and in the Hereafter)." (108:2,3)

This association of prayer and sacrifice is explained in Surah Al-Anam:

"Say (O Muhammad {pbuh}): 'Verily, my prayer, my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinns and all that exists).'"(6:162)

Prayer is an act of life, and sacrifice symbolizes death. Whether our actions are concerned with life or death, our sole purpose must be the Pleasure of Allah. No sacrifice may be offered to any being other than Allah, just as no prayer is valid except if directed to Allah.

WHY DOES MAN ABANDON PRAYER?

Allah Almighty says:

"Then, there has succeeded them a posterity who have given up prayers (i.e. made their prayers to be lost, either by not offering them or by not offering them perfectly or by not offering them in their proper fixed times, etc.) and have followed lusts. so they will be thrown in Hell. Except those who repent and believe (in the Oneness of Allah and His Messenger Muhammad {pbuh}) and work righteousness. Such will enter Paradise and they will not be wronged in aught." (19:59, 60)

Preceding this verse, the Quran gives the example of many previous Prophets and their guided followers. This particular verse explains that the people who abandon prayer are those who follow their own selfish desires. A man can either obey Allah, or he can obey his own wishes; and this obedience is equated to worship by the Quran:

"Have you (O Muhammad {pbuh}) seen him who has taken as his Ilah (god) his own desire? Would you then be a Wakil (a protecting guide) over him?" (25:43)

Allah's Messenger (pbuh) described such people as the sales of Dirhams and Dinars, and things have not change much since his time. Today, the Americans are described by a western author as - 'people who worship the dollar for six days a week, and then they turn to God on the seventh day!"

When a heart is filled with love for money, it has no room for God, and prayer is the first thing to be abandoned.

PRAYER: AN EVERLASTING PRESCRIPTION FOR PURITY, CLEANSING OF SINS AND ENTERING PARADISE

(Some Ahadith on prayer)

1. Abu Huraira narrated that Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said:

"Just see, can anything of his filthiness remain on the body of anyone of you if there were a river at his door in which he washed himself five times daily?" They said, "Nothing of his

filthiness will remain (on his body)." He said, "That is like the five prayers by which Allah obliterates sins." (Bukhari, Muslim)

2. Abu Huraira narrated that Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said:

"Five (daily) prayers and from one Friday prayer to the (next) Friday prayer, and from Ramadan to Ramadan are expiations for the (sins) committed in between (their intervals) provided one shuns the major sins." (Muslim, Tirmidhi)

3. Rabia bin Kab narrated:

I was with Allah's Messenger (pbuh) one night, and I brought him water and what he required. He said to me: "Ask (anything you like)." I said, "I ask your company in Paradise." He said, "Or anything else besides it?" I said, "That is all what I require." He said, "Then help me to achieve this for you by devoting yourself often to prostration." (Muslim)

4. Abu Dhar narrated that Allah's Messenger (pbuh) came out in winter when the leaves were falling. He took hold of a branch (and shook it) and its leaves started falling. Then he said:

"O Abu Dhar!" I said, "Labbaik, O Messenger of Allah!" He said, "Whenever a Muslim prays seeking the Pleasure of Allah, his sins start falling like the leaves of this tree." (Musnad Ahmad)

5. 'Uqba bin Aamir narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said:

"Your Lord is amazed by that shepherd who is at the top of a mountain (with his sheep) and who calls for prayer and then offer his prayers. Allah Almighty says: Look at this slave of Mine who calls for prayer, then says Iqamah for the prayer, and then prays as he is fearful of me. I have forgiven my slave and admitted him to Paradise." (Abu Dawood, Nasai)

PRAYER: A DUTY ON EVERYONE

A child born into a Muslim family begins his life hearing the Adhan in his right ear and the Iqama in his left ear. From his childhood, he should be taught the importance and method of prayer.

'Abdullah bin Amr bin Aas narrated that Allah's Messenger said: "Command your children to pray when they reach the age of seven and admonish them by beating (if they don't pray) at the age of ten. And keep them (i.e. boys and girls) apart in their beds." (Abu Dawood)

Abu Malik Al-Ashjai narrated on the authority of his father that the first thing the Prophet used to teach a new Muslim was the prayer. (Al-Bazzar)

Prayer is just as obligatory for women as it is for men. It is recommended that women should pray at home, but if they wish to attend the mosque for any obligatory prayer, they should not be prevented from doing so.

Abdullah bin Umar once quoted this saying of the Prophet (pbuh) to his son: "If your wife asks permission to go to the mosque you should not stop her." His son Bilal replied: "By

Allah, we will stop them." Abdullah was so displeased at this that he criticized his son in strong terms, adding: "I quote to you what Allah's Messenger (pbuh) has said and you say 'we will stop them'. (All report this except Nisai)

Another narration makes it clear that although women can go to the mosque, they must not wear perfumes when they do so.

SUMMARY:

Prayer is an obligation upon every Muslim, man and woman.

"...Verily, As-Salat (the prayer) is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours." (4:103)

Anas narrated that Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said:

"Whoever forgets a prayer, he should offer it whenever he remembers. There is no expiation for it except this." (All six report it except Malik)

May the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet and upon his family and upon all his followers.